

Strong by OTTSTF

Series: [Stranger Connections \[7\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

"You're strong, El. You're amazingly strong. You forgave him. After everything you've been through, all the pain you've suffered, you still forgave him."

El gets lost in thought as she reflects on her trip to Chicago. As always, bad memories overwhelm the good, and it's Mike's duty to save her from herself.

Strong

Author's Note:

I'm such a sap for these two comforting each-other.
How do I break free of this addiction?

Couldn't help myself - I had to toss some references
in because *why the bloody hell not?*

I'm actually mildly proud of how much I managed to
bash out in this one. I usually look at my own stuff
and cringe but this... I can actually look and say "*Eh,
could be worse.*"

“El? What’s wrong?”

Mike notices El zoned out in thought. They’re watching TV after their bi-daily tutoring session, sat together on the sofa; one of Mike’s arms wrapped around her waist as she leans against him; head nuzzled into his shoulder. Hooper sits out on the porch of the cabin, both to give them both some privacy - which part of him screams over; he should be more protective when it comes to boys and El, but he still feels as if he should give them some privacy, out of the sheer respect he has for the two of them. *Three-hundred and fifty-three days. Enough said.* So here he is, sat on the porch, smoking more than he should, both to give them some space, and to save himself from the eye-rolling that they both put him through.

They’d found a re-run of an episode of Knight Rider, which El jumped at as soon as she learned the main character shared her boyfriend’s name, whilst Mike finds himself overly excited at the idea of an artificially-intelligent computer embedded into a vehicle.

“*Michael?* But that’s you!” she’d said, which Mike smiled at uncontrollably. It was then he’d taught her that people can share the same first name, but having the same last name would be very unlikely.

“Maybe you could be like Michael Knight when we grow up! I could be Bonnie, and dad could be Devon!” she joked soon after, earning a laugh from Michael.

“Maybe, but it’d be no fun without a car like K.I.T.T.” he’d responded. El nodded her head.

“Do you think a car like him could exist?” she’d asked. He pondered for a moment.

“Well, maybe. I doubt it’ll happen any time soon; maybe by 2001 or something.” he reflected back to a movie he’d seen, but couldn’t remember the name of. All he could remember was that it was *really* long, the main part took place in 2001, and it had a computer with a red rot for an eye, who he now realises K.I.T.T.’s red scanner kind of reminds him of now that he thinks about it.

But now he’s focussed on El, who is now staring into the distance, right through the TV in front of them, managing to ignore his first call.

“El?” he tries again, this time breaking her from her distant thoughts. She raises her head from his shoulder to focus on him.

“Yes? Sorry – daydreaming.”

He gives her his signature *don’t worry about it* smile, before asking again.

“What were you thinking about?”

She frowns, and unconsciously drops her head. She’d been thinking back to her trip to Chicago; her time with Kali and her gang. She liked most of them except for Spider-Hater; she’d not forget the knife pulled on her any time soon. Her favourite other than Kali herself would probably be Funshine, she tells herself; the description of “a big teddy bear” making her giggle to herself whenever she thinks about it.

But after those, she thinks to what Kali made her do. She taught her how to harness her full strength whenever she’d need to, although the method she’d given her was not her favourite by any means. *I’d*

rather think of happy memories... of Mike. How happy he and the rest make me.

Maybe she'd try that one day, she tells herself; the day still to come.

But aside from that, Kali tried to turn her into a cold-hearted murderer. The worst part of it? *I nearly did kill that man. If that picture wasn't there... I would've done it. He'd be dead, his children would've lost their father and it would've been my fault.*

Tears begin rolling down her cheek as she realises that, *perhaps she is a monster*. Mike notices, and doesn't hesitate to try to help.

"Hey, hey El, what's wrong?"

She just shakes her head, lifting her arm to wipe tears away with her sleeve.

"Nothing, nothing, I'm fine."

"No, no you're not, but you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I'm sorry."

She shakes her head again.

"Don't be – it's not that, it's just..." she hesitates; *how do I tell him? What do I tell him? What if he thinks I'm a monster? What if he leaves? Me strangling him in my sleep might not be enough, but me strangling a man on purpose? What if that does it?*

"Hey, hey, El, it's okay. You can tell me if you want, but I don't mind if you don't."

Mike tries his best to comfort his girlfriend. He'll never feel fully confident in himself doing so, no matter how often he's had to already. She's been through so much; it doesn't take much for her to break down as she remembers past events; *her 'childhood'*.

"No, Mike, I want to, *sort of*, but I don't know if I should, or how I can."

No, don't. He'll just hate you for it, forever. He doesn't need to know you nearly killed a man.

"That's okay, I understand. Take as long as you need, I'm listening."

*Damnit, Mike, why are you so **good** ? I don't want to scare you away*

*from me for the rest of your life but you make it so damn **hard** to say no.* She ponders for a moment on how to begin spilling her thoughts out to him. An idea pops into her mind, but she quickly dismisses it. *That won't work. He can't do that, she can.*

With that idea out of the way, *as much as she wishes it could be that simple*, she figures she should start from the beginning.

"I went to Chicago." she begins simply. His eyebrows are already reaching for his hairline.

"After seeing mama, I found my sister, and she was in Chicago, so I went there."

"How?" he's already asking questions. "How did you get there?"

"Big car. Lots of people." That's what it is, right?

"Oh, a bus?"

She nods her head. *He's probably right.*

"Then I walked until I found them. A man, with weird hair, asked how I got there, but he didn't believe me so he started pointing his knife at me."

Asshole. If I could lay my hands on you.

"Did you break his arm like you did Troy's?"

She smirks slightly at the memory.

"No. Kali made him see spiders. He doesn't like spiders."

A smirk tries to play at Mike's lips, but curiosity overtakes. "Who's Kali?"

"My sister." she informs him. "The one mama showed me, the one I found."

He nods his head.

"So, she has powers like you?"

Her head tilts as she considers how best to describe her sister.

"Powers, but not like mine. She can make you see, or not see what she wants. She showed me a butterfly..." *and Papa?* "And..." a sigh as she frowns, "Papa."

The frown transfers to him, as if he's copying her.

"Brenner? Why the hell did she show you that asshole?"

"She said he was still alive. She thinks the bad man was right." *why did you think of him? Why?* New tears threat her eyes as her thoughts begin to run all over the place. Brenner, Kali, the bad man, Ray. *Was he even bad any more? Can people change like that?*

"Hey hey, it's okay. They're wrong; they have to be. The Demogorgon got him, remember?"

Mike tries to reassure her, but a voice in the back of his head is against him. *What if she-and he(?) are right? What if Brenner somehow did survive?*

She nods her head, despite the claims.

"That's what I told her, but then she made me see him. She wants me to believe he's alive, like the bad man said."

Okay, who is this bad man?

"Bad man? El, were you in danger?" Panic builds in his expression, both voice and face.

El shakes her head. "Not really, but Kali and her friends go around killing them all."

Woah, okay. Wait, is that good or bad?

"And she was going to kill this man you saw?"

"She wanted me to do it."

Her head ducks in shame. *You nearly did. He nearly gave up, you monster.*

"But you didn't?"

"How do you know?" *no really, how?*

"You said she *wanted* you to, so I just assumed."

Mike, how are you so good at that?

A smile nearly forms as she nods, but it quickly turns to a frown once again.

"But I nearly did, Mike. I wanted to. He hurt Mama so I wanted to

kill him.”

“Bu-” he’s cut off before he can speak.

“I... I was choking him. I was so angry, Mike, I wanted to just let him die as I stopped him from breathing...” the tears rapidly build and begin falling as El describes the monster she thinks she is.

“He told us he’d show us where Papa is if we let him live, but Kali told him I’d find him and told me to do just do it. And I would’ve, Mike. I would’ve but-...” She remembers the picture of the man’s family, laying by his blood-shot face. How guilty it made her feel, even though she’d not killed the man laying in front of her yet.

“I saw a picture. Him and his children, smiling. That’s what stopped me, Mike. I saw that and I knew I couldn’t. I wouldn’t, I didn’t want to then.”

A smile begins to form on his lips, but she continues.

“Kali was telling me to just do it, snap his neck and go but I wouldn’t, so she pointed her gun to his head.”

Oh god.

“Did she shoot?”

“I didn’t let her. I... threw the gun out the window.”

His smile grows. His body is placed into autopilot as he automatically leans in to wrap her in his arms. She’s confused, *very* confused by the gesture, and he can see that.

“And you call yourself a monster. What you did makes you the exact opposite.”

“What? I was choking him, Mike, and I would’ve killed him if I didn’t see the picture.”

How could I not be a monster?

“But you didn’t, El. You let him go and then you saved his life. Do you know what that means?”

She shakes her head as tears continue to fall.

“It means you’re strong, El. You’re *amazingly* strong. You *forgave* him. After everything you’ve been through, all the pain you’ve suffered, you still forgave him. And that makes you so goddamn special, El. Most people would’ve done it. If I were in your shoes, I probably would’ve done it. But you? You forgave him.”

He’s got his ‘*I love you no matter what TM*’ smile on as he tries his absolute best to make her see herself for who she truly is. She feels a smile of her own threaten the frown she currently wears.

“I... yes, I did.”

“Yes, El. You did.”

The smile breaks free onto her lips as she pulls him into a hug. He returns it without hesitation. They hold each-other for a moment, before El places a kiss to his cheek.

“Thank you, Mike.”

Oh man here come the flame-grilled cheeks.

He returns a kiss onto her cheek as he rubs her back with one hand.

“Any time, El. Any time.”

They lean their heads into each-other’s shoulders and remain there for a good minute or more, until they’re interrupted by the cabin door opening, which causes them to jump apart and try to wipe their tears away before...

“Alright it’s getting col-woah, what the hell happened here?”

Author's Note:

Damnit Hopper you did it again.

Please, if you enjoyed, bathe me in your kudos and comments because every single one makes my day, and really helps encourage future stories (and chapters in this case, which you shouldn't need to wait long for!)

Thanks so much for reading!